This 34th annual Camden Conference was unique, as it was presented entirely online. Yet it maintained its tradition of engaging its community in a stimulating discussion of the geopolitics of the Arctic region. One of the presenters, Michael Bravo, a senior lecturer at the University of Cambridge, said, “I am hard pressed to think of another major conference that has grown roots in the community the way you seem to have done.”

In a conventional year, the Camden Conference is presented in the beautiful Camden Opera House with live streaming to audiences in Belfast, Rockland, Portland, and Hanover, New Hampshire. Most venues are sold out with a total attendance of about 1,300. This year, obviously different, may have drawn at least as well, though totals had to be estimated, since multiple viewers were possible in each household. (We have every intention of presenting in the Opera House in 2022.)

The Camden Conference, with its paid staff of Kimberly Scott, executive director, and Lauren Lewis, office manager, is primarily a volunteer organization. Over its three-plus decades it has added an ambitious education program and an annual series of community events, most of them complimentary talks related to the next conference’s topic at local libraries. The chosen topic for a conference is usually determined about 14 months in advance. Detailed planning by the program committee begins in April of the preceding year. High school and college students in our education program study a related curriculum to prepare for attending the conference, where many ask excellent questions. Of course, marketing, fundraising, and financial stewardship are year-round tasks.

Recent Camden Conferences have focused on New World Disorder, Refugees and Global Migration, Religion as a Force in World Affairs, and The Global Politics of Food and Water. The conference has also focused on geopolitical areas, including China, Russia, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and Africa. The February 2020 Camden Conference, “The Media Revolution: Changing the World,” examined how the digital age has changed journalism and communications at home and abroad. Our 2022 conference will focus on the challenges for Europe in the 21st century.

The Camden Conference is a nonpartisan, federally tax-exempt, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. The board of directors includes residents of several Midcoast towns, all of whom volunteer their time, talent, and energy to organize the conference and related programs. Financial support for the Camden Conference comes from attendance fees, memberships, individual gifts, and grants from institutions, foundations, and corporations.
THE 2021 CAMDEN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
The Epicenter of Geopolitics and Climate Change ........................................ 2
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson

Earth’s First Responder in a Warming World: Arctic Climate .......................... 4
Paul Andrew Mayewski

Winners and Losers in the 21st Century Arctic .................................................. 6
Frances Ulmer

A Frozen Region Goes Dynamic ................................................................. 8
Ulf Sverdrup

What Happens in the Arctic Doesn’t Stay There ............................................. 10
Gail Whiteman

Community and Governance in a Fractured World ..................................... 12
Michael Bravo

Greenland—the Challenges of Developing Self-Governance and Safe Communities .......................... 14
Sara Olsvig

The People of Eight Seasons: A Resilient Culture or a Future at Risk? .......... 16
Gunn-Britt Retter

Amid Growing Distrust, Rearmament and Climate Crisis: An Arctic Power Play ............. 18
Thomas Nilsen

Russia’s Symbolic Politics in the Arctic .................................................... 20
Sergei Medvedev

Strengthening Governance of the Arctic Region ......................................... 22
David Balton

Final Panel Highlights ....................................................................................... 23
All Speakers

Moderated by David Brancaccio

The 2021 Camden Conference presented some of the world’s leading experts discussing “The Geopolitics of the Arctic: A Region in Peril,” a topic encompassing the dramatic warming of the region, the prospect of competing interests among many nations, the interests of indigenous peoples, and the implications for shipping and fishing, including possible impact on the state of Maine.

The conference was a technological challenge, as it was entirely live-streamed, with remote connections to Iceland, Russia, northern Norway, the United Kingdom, Greenland, and the United States. With intricate planning by our long-time production chief, Jim Ruddy, and program chair Charlotte Singleton, it flowed with nary a hitch over two days, February 20 and 21. Although the total audience had to be estimated based on multiple viewers in individual households, our ticket sales indicated it may have been seen by about 1,600 people, which would be record attendance. About 300 of these were high school and college students.

In this issue of Highlights we present the main points made by our 11 speakers under the masterful moderation of David Brancaccio from American Public Media and The Marketplace Morning Report. To view the 2021 conference in its entirety, go to the Camden Conference website at www.camdenconference.org.
The Epicenter of Geopolitics and Climate Change

As keynote speaker, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, the former president of Iceland, expertly outlined the crucial importance of the Arctic in environmental and economic terms, as promised in the title of his talk. But, alas, he saved his most forceful remarks for nearly the end of the conference, during the final panel of all presenters.

In the midst of the discussion, he interrupted the conversation to address “the big elephant in the room.” He asked, “Isn’t it essential in order to have success ... in the future of the Arctic to have a more constructive, positive approach toward Russia?” He lamented the emphasis on past events, such as the invasion of the Ukraine. He warned America and Europe against isolating Russia, “the most important Arctic state.” (He noted that its Arctic coastline encompasses seven time zones.)

He said, “All these Arctic policies we have been discussing today will never succeed unless we engage Russia in a very constructive and positive way.” He declared that a crucial opportunity for this change would exist when Russia soon assumes chairmanship of the multilateral Arctic Council. He challenged the new Biden Administration to take a more benign approach toward Russia in order to achieve the West’s environmental objectives in the region. He asked whether it was more important to concentrate on “what happened in the Ukraine 10 years ago” or to engage “the most crucial Arctic state” in solving the region’s climate problems.

Earlier, in his prepared keynote remarks, Grímsson, co-founder of the Arctic Circle group and recognized as one of the world’s strongest advocates for the region, noted that in the past two decades, “This region has been transformed from being peripheral to the rest of the world to become a core territory with respect to the most profound challenge of our times, climate change, but also our core territory of the new geopolitical race between the United States on the one hand and China, to some extent Russia, on the other.”

He observed that the aggressive melting of the Arctic sea ice is “the major cause of extreme weather patterns, not only in the Americas, but also in Asia and other parts of the world.” He noted the recent winter crisis in Texas as an example.

To illustrate his point, Grímsson warned that the melting of a just a quarter of the ice sheet in Greenland would raise sea levels around the world by two meters, enough to harm many large coastal cities.

He said, “I will never forget the moment when the leader of a Chinese expedition to the Arctic, about 10 years ago at a conference I helped to organize in Iceland, put on the screen a list of Chinese cities that would completely disappear with the melting of the Greenland ice sheet.”

He added, “You say in the presentation of the conference, the Arctic is a ‘region in peril.’ That to some extent is true, but I would have chosen to phrase it a little bit differently. I would say the world is in peril because of what’s happening in the Arctic.”

The former president continued, “Why is it that the Arctic is so important in geopolitical terms? The three major reasons—the resources, the energy, and the shipping. In terms of the resources, and I’m not talking about the oil and gas, I’m talking about multiple mining, even ocean resources and others.”

Grímsson recounted that China has recently discussed a ban on the export to the U.S. of “their rare earth metals,” which are critical to the capabilities of the U.S. military.

According to the Financial Times (U.K.), China is considering this because the minerals are important to the manufacture of American F-35 fighter jets and other sophisticated weaponry, according to people
involved in a government consultation. The paper said China controls 80 percent of the world’s supply of these minerals.

So a decision by China on their rare earth metals has a big impact on the capabilities of the U.S. military. Grimsson said, “The other part in the world where rare earth metals can be found … [is] in fact, in Greenland.” He added that while “the media laughed” at the idea, it actually made sense that President Trump would have suggested buying Greenland, if it were only for sale.

Grimsson said that in the “21st century geopolitical race” between the United States, China, and Russia, the way that the three nations conduct themselves in the Arctic will be a major factor in who wins and loses.

But beyond the major powers, Grimsson noted that many other nations, such as Japan, Korea, India, and other Asian countries are taking a greater interest in the science of the Arctic and the implications of the melting sea ice.

He said, “It’s understandable that people find that paradoxical, but it’s one of the reasons why China, Japan, Korea, India, and other Asian countries are now actively participating in Arctic science and research, because they have realized the extraordinary connection between the melting of the Arctic sea ice and how that affects their weather and other climatic conditions.”

Although he was speaking from Iceland, via a live stream, Grimsson was well aware he was addressing many residents of Maine. Some years ago he had visited Portland to deliver a talk on the Arctic, and he was aware that the state sent a large delegation in 2019 to the last “live” meeting of the Arctic Circle organization, which he cofounded in 2013 and still chairs.

The changing climate of the Arctic and the opening of new shipping routes have made Maine more relevant to the Arctic despite its distance from the region, he noted.

He said, “If you look at the map of the globe, you realize that it’s not only Alaska which is relevant for the United States with respect to the Arctic, but Maine is in fact what I called the eastern gateway of the United States to the Arctic through the shipping and other transport lines that link Maine to other Arctic regions in a fascinating way.”

Reported by Matthew Storin

ÓLAFUR RAGNAR GRÍMSSON was elected President of Iceland in five nationwide elections, serving from 1996 to 2016. Previously, he had been Minister of Finance, a member of Iceland’s Parliament, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the University of Iceland’s first professor of political science. He now serves as chairman of the Arctic Circle, the largest annual international gathering on the Arctic, with more than 2000 participants from 60 countries. As an active participant in the global climate dialogue during his presidency and thereafter, President Grimsson has initiated and promoted clean energy projects in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas, especially projects demonstrating Icelandic achievements and technologies. These include the world’s largest geothermal projects, located in numerous Chinese cities. He has been chairman of an international commission on the new geopolitics emerging from global renewable energy transformation, and he also served on the advisory board of Sustainable Energy for All, created by the United Nations and the World Bank. He is also involved in international cooperation on the oceans. President Grimsson has received many international awards, including the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding, presented by the President of India.
Earth’s First Responder in a Warming World: Arctic Climate

The effects of human activity

Paul A. Mayewski

Mayewski began by saying his presentation would first provide insights into what consensus, surprises, and gaps in knowledge exist related to Arctic climate. And second, he would share his thoughts on how mitigation and adaptation should be viewed in the context of future climate.

He contrasted the Arctic and Antarctic regions to help us understand why the Arctic, with its vast expanse of sea ice, is the topic of much of the climate change discussions.

Mayewski said that the Antarctic region is a continent one and a half times the size of the United States, consisting of ice that is, on average, 3,000 meters thick. In contrast, the Arctic region is an ocean covered by ice one to several meters thick, surrounded by land in the United States (Alaska), Canada, Finland, Denmark (Greenland), Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.

He displayed a visual showing the tremendous change in the location and extent of Arctic sea ice or whiteness on earth across the seasons in any given year. Mayewski explained that when these portions of the planet are white, they reflect up to 100% of the incoming radiation from the sun. And when the sea ice is removed, the dark surface of the ocean is presented to the sun. This dark surface absorbs radiation and, more important, also gives off heat that would be trapped if under the white sea-ice surface. Mayewski said this phenomenon is called polar amplification.

“That means that for one degree of warming, you can have at least the net effect of two degrees centigrade of warming in local areas such as the Arctic,” explained Mayewski.

He said that CO2, a greenhouse gas absorbing and emitting radiant energy, has increased one and a half times in recent decades, and this “rise in CO2 is 100 times faster than anything we’ve been able to measure in the 800,000 years of record that we have available from ice cores.” And that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), representing reporting from 195 governments, has issued a consensus report that greenhouse gas rise is the consequence of human activity.

Mayewski displayed three slides providing a quick summary of the impacts of this Arctic warming and sea-ice loss. They include loss of deeper, multi-year ice, acidification of the ocean, and changes in ocean thermal structure. He said this in turn negatively impacts “food provisioning, fishing, polar bears, walrus, crabs, bowhead whales, et cetera.” He reminded the audience that “we are in fact a water planet, and we’re beginning to see an absolutely new ocean appear.” Mayewski said, “The impact of warming of frozen ground is dramatic and very intense. Shorter periods of lake ice, less seasonal snow ice, increased river discharge, plants and animals migrating and changing in their behavior are a consequence.”
Mayewski said studies and reports provide generalized and averaged data useful for basic understanding and projections, but that we all live in locales and our locale could vary dramatically from the norms. He cited an example of local impact, using the five-degree increase in temperature in the Eastern Arctic between 2007 and 2012. Mayewski said this temperature increase was equivalent to doubling the length of summer, and he asked the audience to imagine the tremendous disruption to their people and ecosystem if the length of summer had doubled in Maine in the past five years.

Mayewski said the “five degrees centigrade rise in that five-year period is equivalent in magnitude and speed to the massive, abrupt change in climate that occurred about eleven and a half thousand years ago at the transition between the last vestiges of the ice age and modern climate.”

Mayewski reinforced points made in President Grimsson’s previous talk regarding the impact of the warming of the Arctic. He reminded the audience that the impact includes seeing the changed pattern of the jet stream, yielding cold in warm places, warm in cold places, droughts, floods, and fires.

He said we will need to consider other events beyond the tremendous irregular, unstable behavior of the jet stream as we consider predicting the future. One such event Mayewski noted was the 1991 Pinatubo volcanic eruption resulting in a one- to two-year cooling and a four-degrees centigrade cooling in the Arctic. “That would, in a warming world, have a tremendous impact on, for example, transportation and shipping in the Arctic, granted for a brief period.”

Mayewski went on to list three potential effects of the additional and fresh water now being released by the melting glaciers in Greenland. First, the fresh water in the salty water changes the density of the seawater. He said, “It lessens the likelihood that it sinks. The less it sinks, the less it draws the warm air from North America to Europe.” Second, the lesser draw of warm air means northern Scandinavia could become colder; and third, the melting of permafrost releases its captured methane, which is 30 to 50 times more effective in capturing heat than is CO2.

Mayewski said the IPCC models show a five- to six-degrees centigrade increase in Arctic temperature between 2090 and 2100. He said this could happen much earlier and could happen abruptly.

In summary, Mayewski said human activity is dramatically altering the physical and the chemical climate. The melting of Arctic ice due to increased temperatures is releasing the toxic substances this ice has absorbed from the Northern Hemisphere through the years. He points out that this negatively impacts the indigenous people who eat the marine mammals that are absorbing these toxic substances contained in the local waters.

Further, Mayewski said the Arctic climate is extremely sensitive to small temperature changes. He used the example of the Norse colonies existing between 1000 and 1400 that disappeared from Greenland over a few years because a slight temperature increase created new ice, which stopped the ships that resupplied them from Europe.

“The bottom line is that a warming world leads to an unstable climate, and climate instability is even more-so pushed as a consequence of very sensitive changes in the Arctic,” said Mayewski. He added, “Political cycles are on the order of two to five years. Abrupt climate change, dramatic changes in climate, can operate that fast.”

Mayewski closed by urging that we adopt responsive mitigation and adaptation strategies that address the multiple scenarios of warming, cooling, abrupt changes, and permafrost melting.

Reported by Richard Anderson

PAUL ANDREW MAYEWSKI is director of the Climate Change Institute and Distinguished Professor in the University of Maine’s School of Earth and Climate Sciences, School of Marine Sciences, School of Policy and International Affairs, Business School, and the Center for Ocean and Coastal Law. He has led more than 55 expeditions to some of the remotest polar and high-altitude reaches of the planet (e.g., Antarctica, Greenland, Himalayas, Tibet, Andes, sub-Antarctic islands). He has more than 450 scientific publications and has received numerous honors, including the first internationally awarded Medal for Excellence in Antarctic Research, the Explorers Club Lowell Thomas Award, an honorary Ph.D. from Stockholm University, honorary fellow in the American Polar Society, and fellow in the American Geophysical Union, American Museum of Natural History and the Boston Museum of Science. He has released two popular books and appeared in multiple CBS 60 Minutes programs, several NOVA films, NPR features, and the 2014 Emmy-winning Years of Living Dangerously.
Frances Ulmer spoke for the people of Alaska and its Arctic neighbors. For nearly 50 years she has lived in Alaska, and her extensive involvement in government and environmental policy there gives her a deep perspective on both the challenges and possibilities facing the changed Arctic picture.

“The Arctic of the 21st century is not anything like the Arctic of the 20th century,” said Ulmer. “I think we have to understand that these changes in terms of warming … drive a lot of both the opportunities and the challenges, perhaps the most important of which is the loss of sea ice. So when we talk about winners and losers, we have to start with the fundamentals, which is the loss of sea ice, which affects so many other things.”

Ulmer pointed out the effects, pro and con, of this warming climate on Arctic animal species, indigenous people, industry, shipping, tourism, oil and gas production, commercial fishing, and the military. This warming is felt throughout the world.

“We all know that recently the polar vortex has once again entered the lexicon of all the weathermen, needless to say, [with] the chill that the U.S. has been experiencing. Let’s remember the Arctic is the air conditioner for the planet. And not only does it affect temperatures globally, but it is affecting the jet stream in a way that is really creating some unintended and unfortunate consequences for many areas that are not prepared for what used to be a more stable climate.”

Ulmer explained that many Arctic animal species dependent on the ice have evolved in cold and ice conditions. Bowhead whales have benefited from the melting, however, as it has increased food sources from the Beaufort Sea. This, in turn, is a plus for some of the indigenous people of the Arctic who rely on marine mammals for food. On the other hand, some animals are not faring as well.

“Arctic cod is kind of a mixed bag,” said Ulmer, “whether there are going to be winners or losers. Seabirds and shorebirds—really big losers right now. As a matter of fact,” she said, “a study from the University of British Columbia estimated that we lost 70% of all seabirds between the years of 1950 and 2010 worldwide. So, for a variety of reasons, primarily their food sources, but also warming conditions in the ocean, they’re big losers.” She went on, “And so are the caribou, not only because of parasitic flies in the summer, but also because of icing in the winter, which makes it harder for them to dig through the snow and get to the lichen and other food sources.”

Ulmer reiterated throughout her presentation that all this is dynamic—changing quickly. Trends may not continue, and predictions are difficult. For indigenous people everywhere, especially in the Arctic, changes to the ice pack affect their villages. The diminishing ice and consequent coastal erosion have already forced some tribes in Alaska to relocate for their safety.

The infrastructure change also affects industry. “So, for example, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which has been there since 1977, when it was completed and oil started flowing, has had to continuously change the technology, the way in which the underground structure is frozen, because the permafrost has been thawing.”

Ulmer referred back to keynote speaker Grímsson, who highlighted the global potential for investment in the Arctic, such as elevated interest in shipping, with money-saving shorter trips.

“For those who are particularly bullish on this topic, I would say it has to be considered in the context of the Arctic, which is a very challenging place to
work—cold, dark, big storms. Remember, ice comes back in the winter. When we talk about the ice-free Arctic, we are talking about a relatively short period of time in the summer months, and yes, it’s true, ice is thinning. So even in the winter months, it might be easier to go through, but there are still plenty of issues associated with the viability of increased [shipping] in the Arctic, including lack of infrastructure, lack of navigation aids, inadequate charting in northern waters, et cetera.”

Tourism to the North Pole, prior to the pandemic, was expanding, said Ulmer. She feels this would continue once travel becomes safer again. She gave this field a potential thumbs-up, “if it is done in a way that includes not only local people and local considerations, but the indigenous people—and done carefully, as opposed to super-huge ships that couldn’t possibly have people rescued if something went wrong.”

Another area in the spotlight is oil and gas development. The price of these nonrenewable resources has fallen somewhat since a decade-old USGS survey came out, said Ulmer, but Russia remains a big international investor. Ulmer pointed out that “approximately 60% of all of Russia’s oil reserves are in the Arctic, and over 90% of all of Russia’s natural gas reserves are in the Arctic.”

However, the Arctic is a sensitive area for oil spills. “Cleaning up oil, particularly something like heavy oil in icy waters, would be next to impossible, which, by the way, is why there is a movement to try to get the International Maritime Organization to actually ban heavy fuel oil in the Arctic, the way it is banned in the Antarctic.”

As for commercial fishing, Ulmer is enthusiastic about a recent agreement among the Arctic nations, plus China, Korea, Japan, and the EU, that prohibits commercial fishing in the central Arctic Ocean for 16 years.

Continuing with her theme of winners and losers, Ulmer pointed to military investments in the area. “All of the Arctic nations that have military are also investing more in their military in the Arctic,” she said. “… We’re seeing a step up in awareness of the region as not only a geopolitical tension area in the future, potentially—although I’m happy to say not today, it’s still a region of tremendous cooperation—but to the extent that people are uncertain about the future, it is perhaps logical that there is this additional investment in the military, including exercises.”

Ulm er turned her attention to Maine, where she said shipping, tourism, infrastructure, and investment are all likely, “but whether the economics will be favorable associated with any of these remains to be seen.” For Maine’s fishing industry, it could be both a plus and a minus as fish move north. Environmental and ecological impacts exist, but there’s also “tremendous increase in … research capacity, with more and more funding actually going to universities literally all over the world, but certainly in Maine as well.”

Maine’s Senator Angus King has been part of the Arctic Circle meetings, Ulmer said. New agreements between Norway and Maine exist. Eimskip, Iceland’s largest shipping company, has its North American headquarters in Maine.

Ulm er concluded that “change in the Arctic is dramatic, and it’s very rapid. The implications are local, they’re regional, and they’re global…. ” She added, “And whoever is today winning or losing may very well change. And the last prediction I will make is there will be big surprises, which make it very hard for humanity to do the kind of necessary planning that we like to do when there’s change. Change is inevitable, but the change that’s happening right now is so fast and so dramatic that it really requires all of us to think carefully about how to do this best.”

► Reported by Karin Knudsen Rector

FRANCES ULMER is chair of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, appointed by President Obama, who had also appointed her to the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. Now a Senior Fellow at the Arctic Initiative in the Institute of Politics at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, Ulmer has research interests that include energy, environmental policy, natural resource management, and sustainable development. She is a member of the global board of the Nature Conservancy and of the board of the National Parks Conservation Association. From 2007 to 2011, Ulmer was chancellor of Alaska’s largest public university, the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). Before that, she was a Distinguished Visiting Professor of Public Policy and director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at UAA. An elected official for 18 years, she served as mayor of Juneau, a state representative, and lieutenant governor of Alaska. She had previously been legal counsel to the Alaska Legislature and Director of Policy Development for the state. She was the first chair of the Alaska Coastal Policy Council and served for more than 10 years on the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission.
The key drivers of the Arctic are climate change, international cooperation, and security dynamics among Arctic States, and between Arctic States and non-Arctic States, Sverdrup said. However, climate change is far and away the number-one driver, he said, adding that it is not regional activities, but rather global greenhouse gas emissions that are causing dramatic environmental changes in the Arctic.

“Global climate policy is the single most important policy shaping the future of the Arctic. And I must say to you Americans, dear friends, that many of us are really happy that President Biden has decided to rejoin the Paris Agreement, and even more importantly, that he has put climate and reduction of CO2 emissions as a key policy priority, [which is] very important for Arctic policy.”

Given that the European Union has already launched its European Green Deal, Sverdrup predicts that climate and green policy will emerge as an important future element of transatlantic policy. And, as this happens, he foresees a green shift as the single most important Arctic policy that will change the functioning of the energy and financial markets and increase the cost of extraction of oil and gas.

“We see this already happening. From the Norwegian side, operators already see future extraction of oil and gas resources in the Arctic as probably not so attractive. And it is not likely to go ahead at the speed that they envisioned just some years ago, if it will happen at all.

International, science-based cooperation is a second major driver, Sverdrup pointed out. “We need governance based on science and the precautionary principle. Science cooperation is and has been a key element of governance in the Arctic. It is crucial in the management of resources and not least, our maritime resources.”

As an example, he pointed out that Norway and Russia, although they may disagree on many topics, have a well-functioning, science-based assessment of resources that enables the two nations to negotiate fishing quotas as well as other resource issues.

In the realm of international order, Sverdrup credited past agreements and international governing bodies as crucial to Arctic governance that has minimized conflict. “The Arctic is not an ungoverned space. In fact, it is quite regulated. And importantly, many of these regulations are designed rather cleverly. They are designed not only to tackle the problems of the past. In fact, they are designed so they can help us resolve some of the challenges of the future.”

He pointed out that there are few territories in the Arctic that are disputed or contested, crediting the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as one of several key agreements. Although the U.S. is not a signatory, Sverdrup said, there is a strong commitment in the U.S. to use international law to ensure peaceful governance of the region.

Among other international bodies that contribute to governance of the Arctic, he said, are the Arctic Council and the Arctic Chiefs of Defense, as well as international, well-functioning cooperation among coast guards of several nations.

“The regulatory regime is quite forward looking, taking into account the climate changes that are expected [as well as] issues of security and governance. And we are really happy to see that the U.S., after the election of the new administration, has a strong commitment to international rules and to these international norms. And, of course, the U.S. has also expressed a willingness to take on leadership in addressing regulatory loopholes and challenges that exist. U.S. leadership input into the development of this multilateral framework is really welcomed.”

Although Arctic governance and cooperation have succeeded to a large extent, Sverdrup identified three ongoing challenges. The first is more demanding security dynamics between actors in the Arctic. The second is the contested relationships between Arctic States and non-Arctic states (chiefly China). The third challenge is the differing approaches to Arctic economic development with the deployment and use of new technologies.

On the subject of security dynamics between nations, Sverdrup pointed out that several nations, including Russia, have recently increased or plan to...
increase military activities and capabilities in the Arctic. “The protection of military assets placed in the Arctic is fundamental to Russia’s security strategy, including maintaining second-strike capability, nuclear second-strike capability, and, thus, deterrence. A lot of Russian nuclear defense relates to submarines in the Arctic... It’s a fact that the country has expanded its icebreaker fleet, reanimated and expanded Soviet-era military bases, built new bases, and has announced plans to deploy new weapons systems in the Far North.”

Both Russia and NATO have conducted large military exercises in the Arctic in the past two years. Sverdrup said that, from a security perspective, it is critically important that military developments are “balanced, transparent and predictable. Sufficient steps must be taken to ensure good communications, rules of engagement, and the avoidance of brinkmanship and accidents. ... To cope with the increased military presence, the parties must be particularly sensitive to how new technologies, new generations of weapon systems, and military postures might trigger unwanted escalatory dynamics and accidents.”

A second element of security dynamics relates to Arctic States and non-Arctic states. One of the primary concerns is China. Recent Chinese actions include a self-proclaimed status of “near–Arctic state.” Sverdrup pointed out that China has enhanced its capabilities in Arctic maritime operations, shipping, and research. There is uncertainty, he said, on China’s position in international law, particularly related to the developments in the South China Sea. Some have suggested, he said, that China may leverage economic developments to influence the region’s future governance, and use those developments as a precursor to military expansionism.

As Sverdrup sees it, new technologies and developments in the Arctic are sure to bring about new opportunities, along with unforeseen consequences and changes in the dynamics of the region. And this is why, Sverdrup said, it is so important that the major players stick with the international agreements and the regional governance mechanisms, as well as the value of science.

Sverdrup credited President Biden with a strong return to science. “I think it is extremely important,” he said. “It provides predictability for Arctic policy and governance, and it paves the ground for better cooperation.”

For the foreseeable future, he said, the most important driver is climate change. “... the region is the victim, but in changing the Arctic, these changes will also be felt globally.”

Reported by Bruce Cole

ULF SVERDRUP is the director of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). He holds a doctoral degree in political science from the University of Oslo. Before taking up the position at NUPI, he was a professor at the BI Norwegian Business School, and a research professor at the ARENA Centre for European Studies at the University of Oslo. He earned his master’s degree at the University of Bergen. Sverdrup has published extensively on various topics in international politics, with a particular emphasis on European politics, European integration, and Norwegian foreign policy. Sverdrup was Head of the Secretariat for the Official Norwegian Europe Review, which assessed the impacts and implications of Norway’s agreements with the EU. He has also worked as senior advisor in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
What Happens in the Arctic Doesn’t Stay There

The Arctic as a Barometer of Global Risk

On day two of this year’s Camden Conference, during the final panel discussion, Gail Whiteman best summarized her own day-one presentation: “The Arctic is the canary in the coal mine for climate change.”

Whiteman’s presentation wrapped dry scientific data in vivid analogies, focusing on the loss of Arctic sea ice. Her conclusion is that global catastrophic climate events are directly related to the rapid climate changes in the Arctic. Then she put a price tag on the economic cost of these catastrophic events.

Whiteman postulated that the best insurance policy against runaway climate change is a stable Arctic climate without further loss of sea ice. This Arctic insurance policy, an interesting concept in itself, is, however, in trouble.

“Scientists studying the Arctic have been worried for a long time,” said Whiteman. “Since the 1970s, we have known that the Arctic Ocean is really in crisis. There’s been a 50% reduction in the thickness of sea ice since the seventies, 50% area loss, 75% volume loss. Multiyear ice has really declined rapidly, and there’s been a 95% loss since 1985. And if you see the Arctic, and you position it as one of the world’s best insurance policies against runaway climate change, we can see with these figures that our insurance policy is in trouble. And that’s the message that I try to take to world leaders.”

The rest of the globe is hosting unprecedented fires and storms related to the Arctic climate changes. Whiteman pointed out that Russia this past summer witnessed major fires in its Arctic tundra and boreal forests, along with extreme temperatures.

“They were at 38 degrees Celsius. That’s over a hundred degrees Fahrenheit. That’s 40 degrees warmer than the average temperature would normally be. Of course, there were wildfires that raged throughout the Arctic, and they released a ton of carbon, record-breaking amounts and record-breaking pollution levels, which of course accelerate the melt because of the small particles that go on the white ice and snow.” Russian fires produced tons of soot, which fell onto snow, causing a reduction in 80% of the sunlight normally reflected by white snow, Whiteman went on to say. More heat is absorbed by the earth and sea ice.

Thawing permafrost also accelerates global warming, said Whiteman. Permafrost entraps large amounts of methane gas. As it melts, methane—24 times more deleterious than CO2—escapes into the atmosphere. Methane does not last as long as CO2, but the melting permafrost is releasing tons of methane gas. Scientists are also observing methane outbursts from the bottom of once perennially frozen Arctic lakes.

In the western U.S., said Whiteman, summer fires have broken historic records in the numbers of acres burned and the tens of thousands of people displaced.

“If you were in California or the West Coast of the U.S. last year, there’s no question you were choking on the air; the wildfires were raging. It was unbelievable, all the way down. You could smell it, taste it in LA.”

And, the U.S. East Coast and the Caribbean are experiencing more frequent superstorms, of longer duration. The disruption in the polar vortex this winter, 2021, produced extensive power failures and freezing temperatures across Texas. Compounding the health threat of sub-zero temperatures without power was the loss of safe drinking water for
One estimate of current and projected climate catastrophes on a net present value basis is about $70 trillion, according to Whiteman.

“And it’s not just in the U.S., said Whiteman. “If we take a look at one of the large reinsurers in Asian goods to the U.S. East Coast, but pollution from ship engines burning heavy fuel oil deposits more black soot on the white snow and ice, increasing temperatures. The cost to other nations with low-lying territories and cities from rising sea levels will be in the order of $10 trillion.

Sea level rise is one problem, but another, flooding, finds the U.S. at the top of that dubious list. Through her nonprofit Arctic Base Camp and presentations to the leading economic powers at Davos, Whiteman points out to the CEOs of major food companies that drought and flooding will depress global food production, “Because as the Arctic changes, we’re going to see extreme weather, and we’re going to have food scarcity risk increase as well as water scarcity.”

Whiteman then asked the question: Who are the major culprits in contributing to global warming through CO2 emissions? She highlighted the top four. The U.S. emits 5.3 GT (metric gigatons) of CO2 annually, which melts about 16,000 km2 of Arctic ice, about 90 times the area of Washington, D.C. The EU’s 3.5 GT of CO2 melts about 10,500 km2, an area the size of Paris. China’s 10 GT of CO2 eradicates about 30,000 km2, an area 10 times the size of Hong Kong or about the area of Belgium. India’s 2.5 GT of CO2 removes 7,500 km2 of ice, five times the area of New Delhi.

To achieve a sustainable Arctic, the target sea level temperature rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius, projected in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, must not be exceeded, Whiteman said. This mandates a reduction of global CO2 emissions by half by 2030 and to net zero by 2050. Whiteman stated emphatically that additional oil and gas drilling in the Arctic is simply out of the question.

Despite this bleak analysis of the condition of the “canary in the coal mine” Arctic, Whiteman is more optimistic about arresting climate change now than in the past five years. The cooperation worldwide in stemming the COVID-19 pandemic placed humanitarian concerns above economics. She expects that countries rebuilding their economies after the pandemic will be much more low-carbon compliant.

“If they are not low-carbon compliant, we can really probably say goodbye to the Arctic summer sea ice, which will pose economic risks and social risk for us well into the future. ... [But] I’d have to say that I am more hopeful now than I have been for the last five years. And that’s not because the Arctic is in any healthier state, but it’s because I can see that when humanity works together, we can actually tackle tremendous changes. And we’ve done that with the pandemic, and we’re certainly getting our way out of that. And I think we can do that with the Arctic as well.”

Reported by Stephen Orsini

GAIL WHITEMAN is Professor of Sustainability at the University of Exeter Business School (United Kingdom), and Professor-in-Residence at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, where she is actively involved in building science-based targets, including those for a future low-carbon economy. Dr. Whiteman is an expert on global socio-economic risks emerging from climate change. She is the founder and executive director of Arctic Basecamp, a unique science-communication platform with a flagship event at the World Economic Forum in Davos. She has published more than 60 academic papers, including co-authored pieces with Christiana Figueres, the former executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. She is a regular contributor to the World Economic Forum’s online Agenda. Dr. Whiteman earned a Ph.D. in business organization and management at Queen’s University (Canada).
B ravo began his presentation with a slide showing the “extraordinary diversity” of the Arctic. “[The slide] makes the first point that the Arctic is inhabited, which sometimes gets forgotten,” said Bravo. “So that’s the key point, but look at the range of languages. ... I understand that in Alaska alone there are roughly 230 tribal peoples recognized in one way or another. So this is a special region with extraordinary cultural diversity that is at the heart of the character of the Arctic region.”

Bravo described his role at the Camden Conference as “a bit peculiar, speaking alongside two experienced Northern leaders ... [who are] the real experts. I’m neither indigenous nor a policymaker. My role here today is as an educator.”

Partnerships, he said, are at the heart of research in the Arctic—economic partnerships, cultural partnerships with Northern peoples and other Northern citizens.

“And that means listening. Research is not just about professing, as professors are supposed to do, but about listening. And I think that increasingly means sharing the creation of research agendas so that we also try and solve the problems that are chosen by people living in the Arctic.”

Bravo said he wanted viewers to think about a dialogue that takes place between those people who are outside the Arctic and those who are in the Arctic. For 20 or 30 years or longer, Bravo said, the dominant ethical approach to research in the Arctic has been collaborative.

Collaboration in the Arctic is essential for reasons that have geopolitical implications, said Bravo. He pointed to his work at various times with the University of Greenland (Ilisimatusarfik), Arctic University of Norway, Centers for Saami studies, Nunavut Arctic college, Aurora College, University of Alaska, and various indigenous arts producers. “Not only is this region populated,” he said, “but it’s one that has strong voices and strong institutions of education.”

Partnerships are built on trust, Bravo said, adding that they also implicitly depend on some notion of community that brings people together, however diverse the people are, with common goals.

“And this is as true in global climate talks and economic development as it is, say, in circumpolar governance,” said Bravo. “So community is a big deal, and we mustn’t make the mistake of trying to understand Arctic communities as though they’re kind of these distant, remote, sparsely populated settlements, because that’s a tiny part of the story.”

Urbanization is a really important factor in the Arctic, said Bravo, with many Northern indigenous peoples living in cities such as Iqaluit, Anchorage, Nuuk, and Arkhangelsk. Many indigenous people also live beneath the Arctic Circle, including in Inuit communities in Ottawa and Montreal, and Greenlandic communities in Copenhagen.

These cities really matter, according to Bravo, because they’re part of the global network through which Northern leaders and citizens reach out to and are connected to the rest of the world.

“So much is said about the Arctic as a region founded on cooperation. ... But cooperation is predicated on the notion of a coherent community, on some notion of cohesion. But as the title of my talk suggests, it’s also a case that the sense of community is fractured. I mean, there are differences within the Arctic, economic differences, considerable inequalities across the Arctic within states, between different states. And it’s also the truth that the eight Arctic States have not always been keen on ceding power and investing in Northern regions and peoples, sometimes happier to take the credit for it than to do the hard work.”

Over many years of research, said Bravo, he has learned that culture and politics are closely related.
The community is geopolitics, he said, and the pandemic has probably made that more clear than ever before.

“Just think about health,” he said. “Just think about vaccines. The human body is constantly the topic of the news, and the community spirits, as well as the fracturing of communities, is also at the heart of public health. And indeed it’s undeniable surely that it is the subject of geopolitics, over the past year in particular. So while we are rightly told that climate and the physical processes of the earth are a major driver in the Arctic and understanding the Arctic, so too is community and governance.”

We realize we need to think about community on different scales, said Bravo. The Arctic has an inhabited region, but the Arctic is also part of a global community. One of the things that the Arctic brings the world is a delicate sense of moral authority. When humanity works together, he said, as illustrated through the Arctic Council and other international initiatives, particularly those of the permanent participants, that’s the collective coming together of indigenous groups across national boundaries, and a good advertisement for the Arctic.

But then there is the matter of a fractured Arctic. “There are inequalities in the Arctic and when these inequalities grow,” said Bravo, “... then the whole regional cooperation becomes less effective.”

The weaker the forces of cooperation, the greater the inequality, said Bravo, and the more the Arctic can begin to fragment into actually three regions—the North American Arctic of Arctic Canada and Alaska, the Scandinavian Arctic, including Greenland, and then also what’s being called by Mia Bennett the Asian Arctic, that is, the Arctic of Russia, China, and perhaps also Japan and Korea.

“I would like to see more support for the work of indigenous writers and publishers of those writers.”

Bravo turned to the Northern Sea Route, also called the Northeast Passage, and now referred to by a third name, the Polar Silk Road, referring to the Silk Road that stretched from Cathay to Venice, from China to Europe, right across Central Asia.

“And so it’s become synonymous with the massive development, the Chinese investment in the Belt and Road Initiative. ... So there’s a geopolitics at play in the very naming of the geography of the Arctic.”

There’s every reason to believe, said Bravo, that the indigenous politics and culture of the Arctic is in some way going to resonate or have implications for the politics of other regions.

“Now,” said Bravo, “I take great heart coming back to the question of hope from my students, who have expressed such an interest to move beyond the Arctic as an enclosed space, to understand more about how it’s interconnected with other parts of the world. To do this doesn’t mean learning less about the Arctic, rather it means listening more acutely to the people who live in the Arctic. ... I would like to see more support for the work of indigenous writers and publishers of those writers. Say, for example, Greenlandic poets such as Torkil Morch, Gerda Hvisterdahl, Innunquaq Larsen, published beautifully in translation ... or indigenous dancers like Tanya Tagaq, or filmmakers like Zacharias Kunuk from Igloolik. I think all these people have a lot to say, both in terms of self-representation and their views of their own world. But the Arctic is not herm etically sealed. So if one of the key questions of the Arctic is about what makes our planet a habitable place, then we can be pretty confident that Northern peoples and their cultures will continue to be insightful and to play a major role in that conversation.”

Reported by Ann Cole
Sara Olsvig focused on her insights into how Greenland has debated and impacted the geopolitics of the Arctic directly from Greenland by the way it exercises its right to self-determination. She took as her starting point President Trump’s 2019 expressed interest in the buying of Greenland and quoted the prime minister of Denmark’s response that “Greenland is not for sale: And I would like to say that I cannot sell Greenland, as Greenland is not Danish. Greenland is Greenlandic.”

“How can the Danish prime minister say that Greenland is not for sale because Greenland is Greenlandic and not Danish? Well, over the past 50 years, the people of Greenland, as an indigenous people and as a people now recognized pursuant to international law, have been gaining more and more self-determination. This has happened by the initiative of the people of Greenland.”

Olsvig explained that Greenland is part of the great competition in the Arctic because there is still one American military base in Greenland. It is Thule, part of the missile defense system, going back to the 1941 defense agreement between Denmark and the U.S., which was renewed after the war, in 1951.

In 1979 Greenland obtained home rule and subsequently established its own parliament and government. In 2009 after long negotiations, again by the initiative of the people of Greenland negotiating with Danish politicians, self-government was inaugurated. Both the 1979 Home Rule Act and the 2008 Act on Self-Government passed the Danish and the Greenlandic parliaments. This followed long UN processes that Greenlandic experts and Greenlandic leaders, part of the Inuit leadership in the Arctic, participated in, as the UN developed its Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognizes indigenous peoples as equal to all other peoples, with the right to self-determination. It was formally announced to the UN following the inauguration of the Self-Government Act.

The Self-Government Act, said Olsvig, laid out a path to further self-determination and the possibility of Greenland’s becoming independent of Denmark. It gave Greenland the authority to act on foreign policy matters within what had already been taken over legislatively from Denmark. That included fisheries, business development, and possible educational agreements with other countries. While not a member of the EU, Greenland has good agreements with that body on fisheries and education. Greenland was also free to initiate work on a Greenlandic constitution, which is ongoing.

A general election is scheduled in April at the municipal level and for parliament. Olsvig defined the three issues of major debate as:

1. Fisheries, which today represent 90% of Greenland’s exports, with East Asia the second-largest market. Brexit is a challenge because Greenland doesn’t have a trade agreement with Britain. On the internal level, there is the issue of how many licenses to give Greenland’s coastal fishermen, particularly for halibut, with a concern for unsustainable development.

2. Mining, with concerns about the possible environmental impact of the mining of uranium and rare-earth elements in South Greenland, with public attention on an environmental impact statement sent out by the company behind it. In 2013 the uranium zero tolerance [policy] was repealed by a one-vote majority in the Greenland Parliament. In South Greenland, the sheep farmers’ association and local fishermen’s and hunters’ associations are now raising their voices against the mine.
Olsvig believes that “There are now even more people in Greenland worried about the possible environmental impacts of such an open-pit uranium mine in the middle of Greenland’s only agricultural area.”

3. Construction of two or three new, very big airports in Nuuk and Ilulissat. They are expensive and require moving large amounts of rock, an infrastructure challenge. China and the U.S. exhibited interest in the decision-making process, and Denmark contributed loans and co-ownership.

Olsvig showed a map of Greenland, which has 2.2 million square kilometers, and explained that there are only 56,000 people there. The majority are indigenous, scattered around the 44,000-kilometer coastline in towns and settlements, with high inequity and inequality—the highest in the Nordic countries. There is general agreement on the need to prevent violence against women and abuse of children—issues that remain because of generational trauma from having been colonized.

Olsvig’s colleagues at the University of Greenland, Maria Ackrén and Rasmus Leander Nielsen, recently published the first foreign and security policy opinion poll in Greenland. The top challenge the poll revealed was the economic situation, the second unemployment, and the third higher living costs. At the bottom were fears of terrorism and military threats in the Arctic. In response to the question “Should Greenland cooperate more or less with the following countries and organizations?” the top country chosen for cooperation was Iceland, with Canada second, the U.S. third, and then Denmark. In relation to the great powers, there were ambiguous answers about relations with China, U.S., and Russia, but generally people want to cooperate, Olsvig said, and also keep an open mind with regard to investments.

In terms of opinions about foreign investments in Greenland, most were positive. With regard to defense and military issues, 75.5% consider their alliance in NATO a positive thing, but 81.6% are negative about following the U.S. policies towards China. Olsvig believes that is because Greenlanders see China as an important market for their fish products. Asked about alliances, 68% want Greenland to continue with today’s alliances, but 70% say no to Greenland’s having its own military.

Olsvig is concerned, because she believes Danish defense and Danish politicians are increasing their activities in Greenland and recently published a new defense package in which new defense education is included. “The Danish politicians have also ... said that they will debate how this education is going to be formed with Greenland before implementing it,” she said.

Olsvig concluded by stating, “It’s important to realize that looking at the geopolitical development in the Arctic cannot only be analyzed through realist eyes, speaking of international relations theories.”

To fully understand developments in the Arctic, one must recognize the institutions of the Arctic peoples, Olsvig said.

“I’m saying ‘peoples’ because we are recognized as peoples and not just communities. Greenland self-determination is not limited to social and cultural affairs, health and education. Decisions taken in Greenland have direct implications to security and defense matters as well. And by exercising the right of self-determination, Greenland has gradually developed its self-governance on its own. It’s Greenland that has taken the initiative every time self-determination has been widened. And the people of Greenland have the legal right and obligation to be the decision makers on the future of Greenland, also in times of great power competition.”

►Reported by JoAnne Bander

**SARA OLSVIG** is a Ph.D. fellow at Ilisimatusarfik, the University of Greenland, located in the city of Nuuk. She is also the current chairwoman of Greenland’s Human Rights Council and an assigned member of the Constitutional Commission of Greenland. She served as a member of the Parliament of Denmark and the Parliament of Greenland in the years 2011 to 2018 and has been leader of the political party Inuit Ataqatigiit. Olsvig was vice premier and Minister of Social Affairs, Families, Gender Equality and Justice in the Government of Greenland from 2016 to 2018. She was also the chairperson of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. Olsvig holds a M.Sc Anthropology. She had previously worked as executive director for the Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland and is now a delegate to the council. She is Inuk and lives in Nuuk with her partner and their children.
Gunn-Britt Retter began by telling Camden Conference attendees that the Sami people divide the year into eight seasons that are based on the reindeer cycle throughout the year. The cycle directs such activities as migrations, calving, ear-marking, and slaughtering. The reindeer also seek different types of landscape during the different parts of the year. In the marine environment, a different catch is available for each season.

Sápmi, the Sami homeland, is 70 degrees north. Retter shared reflections about how the Sami culture relates to and copes with environmental and climate changes, the challenges they are facing and the solutions they have attempted.

“We might be a nation small in numbers,” said Retter, “thus a small piece of the geopolitical Arctic puzzle, but we are holding long roots, history, and knowledge of the territories in the Nordic High North, a region where others now see a wealth of opportunities.”

“While a large portion of the Sami today live in cities and towns,” Retter pointed out, “and many have higher education and paid day jobs, the traditional livelihoods such as reindeer husbandry, subsistence fishing, hunting, trapping, and gathering, and the combination of these, are still essential economies for the Sami culture, either as a main income or a subsistence activity on the side to other income, and still continue the basis for where we see the future opportunities.”

As noted by other speakers, Retter said, climate change in the Arctic happens two to three times faster than in other regions.

“Globally, the discussion is about limiting climate change to 1.5 degrees. It seems however, we are steering towards two degrees or even more. This means four to six degrees or more increase in average temperature for the Arctic, and the eight seasons are shifting. The Arctic, as we know it, might soon not be recognizable.”

Retter described the Sami as a people still living in close relationship with nature and the seasons, with a great deal of knowledge about the impacts of climate change. Expected climate changes, she said, can lead to major changes in the ecosystems and in the nature and resource foundation for the Sami culture.

“This means that species that sustain us, as the Sami food culture and the Sami handicraft or duodji tradition, disappear or deteriorate in quality.”
The Sami have experience in dealing with changes, Retter said, as they already relate to the shifts through the eight seasons.

“In nature-based economies,” she said, “people deal with changing conditions in weather, wind, and surroundings all the time. If the pastures are locked by ice in the winter, then you have to lead the herd to alternative areas where they may access the pasture. In the worst case, they must be fed. If bogs, rivers, and lakes open up earlier in the spring, the reindeer herd must be led on alternative routes on their migration to summer pasture. The female reindeer will return to its birthplace and needs peace when it gives birth to its calf. During the height of summer, there might be lots of insects bothering. Then the reindeer need their windy high-lying areas to get away from the nuisance. This has been learned through generations.”

Flexibility is the key to survival in harsh climatic conditions, Retter said. The largest immediate threat to the Sami culture, and to reindeer husbandry in particular, might not be climate change or biodiversity loss per se, but the authorities’ mitigating measures intended to reduce CO2 emissions, the secondary effects of climate change. Retter cited wind turbines as an example.

“Giant wind turbines are best located far away from urban areas and therefore granted a license mainly in existing reindeer grazing lands. … Wind turbines represent massive nature destruction, with associated roads and power grids to transport energy to the market. Today’s turbines are enormous. And have you ever thought that the low sun in the North means that the turbines cast long, moving shadows. A turbine does not only take the piece of land it is placed on.”

As other societies shift from fossil fuels to electric cars, buses, ferries, etc., said Retter, there is an immense need for battery development, which requires minerals, including copper, from mines established in Sami areas. This, in turn, requires roads, strong power lines, and permission to dispose toxic tailings on the seafloor in the fjord. Climate changes and mitigation measures cause massive changes in the way land is used, and Sápmi is a resource supplier for the state and the investments from outside.

“The Sami call this green shift ‘green colonization,’” Retter said, “and the Sami people are rising up against this continued colonization, which will lead to a Sami culture balancing on the verge of extinction. Reindeer husbandry and small-scale fisheries need more flexibility to adapt their activities in the time of climate change, not less flexibility.”

This “green colonization,” Retter argued, is driven by the desire for continuous economic growth for the business community, economies that are built on people’s ever-increasing consumption patterns.

“The only ones who are met with demands for reduction from the authorities are reindeer husbandry and traditional fishermen. The Sami are among those who contribute the least to what leads to climate change, but their livelihoods are among the first to be affected by the changes. Those who have the greatest need for climate-friendly infrastructure impose on the people and areas with the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions the greatest burdens of land loss and reduction in culture-bearing occupations. There must be a more equitable distribution of the burdens. They expect climate justice. The Sami people and other indigenous peoples worldwide cannot bear the heaviest burden for society’s need for green shifts. The Sami people need to be more involved in the decision-making in the countries in which they reside than they are today, even though their rights as indigenous peoples are recognized.”

Retter concluded by saying that the eight seasons have taught the Sami that flexibility is key to resilience in a changing environment. The seasons are changing faster than the Sami collective memory remembers, she said, and these changes are creating challenges to the Sami culture. The boom in developing alternative energy resources, while well intentioned, she said, is disturbing the fine balance needed for the culture’s existence to a tipping point on their traditional territory.

► Reported by Jane Monhart

**GUNN-BRITT RETTER** is head of the Arctic and Environmental Unit of the Saami Council, which represents indigenous Saami organizations in Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden. She works on issues related to indigenous peoples and indigenous knowledge, including climate change, biodiversity, pollution, management of natural resources, and language. Previously, she had worked on environmental issues at the Arctic Council’s Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat in Copenhagen, Denmark. She has participated in numerous senior-level Arctic Council and United Nations meetings on climate science, biodiversity, and related issues. Retter is a board member of the Sámi University of Applied Sciences and the International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI). She served for two terms in the Sámi Parliament of Norway. Retter was born and raised in the coastal Saami community of Unjarga/Nesseby by Varangerfjord in northeastern Norway. She was trained as a teacher at Sámi University College (Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Norway) and holds an M.A. in bilingual studies from the University of Wales.
Amid Growing Mistrust, Rearmament and Climate Crisis:

An Arctic Power Play

Thomas Nilsen

Thomas Nilsen, editor of the Barents Observer, spoke to the Camden Conference from his office in Kirkenes, Norway, about six miles from the border of Russia, on whose Arctic affairs his newspaper is a frequent commentator, and one hour by boat to the Barents Sea, an arm of the Arctic Ocean, from which his paper gets its name.

He noted that, at the time of his talk, the outside temperature was -17 degrees Fahrenheit, and that there was sea ice well out into the Barents Sea. Nilsen characterized the goal of the Barents Observer as “a civilian media radar in the border area,” pointing out that he was about 55 miles from the nearest nuclear-powered submarine bases of Russia’s Northern Fleet.

His talk would be about “how Norway is trying to balance the deterrence and reassurance of being a neighbor to a big power, Russia, and at the same time being a NATO member.” He clarified that, although Sweden and Finland are not NATO members, Nordic military cooperation is strengthening, and that Norway, Sweden, and Finland work together on defense, sharing military hardware and conducting cross-border training exercises, emphasizing that “an attack or a conflict in one of those countries will automatically have spillover for the others.”

To emphasize the sensitivity of Norway’s strategic location, Nilsen pointed out that the near part of the Barents Sea was currently closed off for civilian fishing vessels, due to Russian missile testing in the area, clarifying that, while the area in question is “an exclusive Norwegian economic zone, it is international waters. So, Russia has the right to do so, but for us sitting here on the coast, it is not exactly what we would call a friendly neighborhood gesture.”

Nilsen then explained that the likely reason for Russia’s “testing” was the appearance of four American strategic bombers being deployed in central Norway and was Russia’s “direct signal to Norway that they dislike the American presence in the area.”

Nilsen stressed that “this has been a pattern [Norwegians] have seen since 2016–2017, that of Russia escalating with missile shootings into Norway’s economic zone.” He pointed out that there’s been more NATO presence in northern waters, noting last summer’s visit to the Barents Sea by a group of British and U.S. naval vessels, the first since the Cold War. “And that’s just surface vessels. There are submarines under the surface that we don’t see, but we know that they are there,” Nilsen said.

“So in between that, Norway is squeezed. What should we do? We are good NATO members. We depend on NATO for our own security. But at the same time, we have a neighbor that will continue to be our neighbor, and we have to balance it with good neighborly relations.”

To seek such relations, Norway has asked NATO allies not to exercise close to Russia’s nearby Kola Peninsula, and the American aircraft are staying suitably far from the border to give Russia better warning time, in case of escalations.

But here Nilsen stressed the importance of understanding Russia’s sensitivities in the region. “This is the Russian Northern Fleet’s access to the North Atlantic,” he said, its only reliable access to the open ocean, its other major fleets being hemmed in by the constricted exits from the Baltic and Black Seas.

Nilsen here added that though many journalists are attributing this Russian “rearmament” to a “desire to protect the natural resources and new seaways that are opening up,” he disagrees, linking it to tensions between NATO and Russia, increasing the latter’s desire “to secure their own vessels’ access to free oceans.”

Nilsen finds this escalation “a bit scary,” citing Norway’s concerns about Russia’s testing of new
weapons, such as “the nuclear-powered underwater drone, the so-called Poseidon drone, and nuclear-powered cruise missiles. During a test in the summer of 2019, a weapon exploded and caused a spike in radiation in Russia’s nearby White Sea. But Norwegians realize that Russia is “using these huge Arctic areas for testing and development of new weaponry, because there are no neighbors there” and they don’t have many other options.

(In a later Q&A period, Nilsen explained this point, saying that NATO’s vast superiority in conventional weapons has forced Russia to rely more on its nuclear alternatives.)

On the more positive side, Nilsen indicated that, dating back even to the Cold War, Norway has had special relations with Russia, citing agreements on the stocks of Arctic cod in the Barents Sea, jointly managed by Norway and Russia, adding that “this is the best-managed of marine resources on any world ocean and goes on even in times of closed borders due to coronavirus, even in times of international geopolitical tensions.” He also noted Norwegian/Russian cooperation on environmental issues and on search and rescue in the Arctic seas.

In this regard, he mentioned his participation in a joint Norwegian-Russian search and rescue exercise in the Barents Sea one and a half years ago and his amazement at how “people are working together to solve a task out in the open ocean in a search for people missing at sea, oil spill preparedness, and so on; they don’t think about big politics.”

Further, Nilsen pointed out that, due to the climate changes, “looking at the map from the top of the world, we are getting new neighbors. From my town, it is closer in distance to the northern archipelagos of Canada, to Ellesmere Island, than it is farther south in Europe, to Italy for instance.”

As an example of this, he cited a remarkable incident “last fall before Christmas, when, because of the engine failure of an American icebreaker sailing out of Alaska, they asked Norway for help. So, the Norwegian Coast Guard vessel KV Svalbard sailed over to the waters of the Beaufort Sea [north of Alaska] to recover some scientific instruments that were collecting temperature measurements of the Arctic Ocean.”

In concluding, Nilsen stressed that the “the Arctic is not dividing. It’s becoming more and more connected, and there is some very good cooperation” going on. “We think that, although there is a lot of focus on rearmament of the Arctic, the area is seen from both Russia and the Nordic countries as an area where there are no rules that need to be rewritten.”

During a later Q&A session, Nilsen was asked about his newspaper’s recent problems with Russian censors, who have banned the Barents Observer from Russia, despite the newspaper’s appeals to the top court of the Russian judicial system. He said that, for the time being, the paper is still available in Russia via podcasts.

Reported by Charles Graham

THOMAS NILSEN is editor of the Barents Observer, based in Kirkenes, northern Norway. He has long experience in media cooperation across the borders in the High North of Europe, beginning as a radio and newspaper reporter even before the breakup of the Soviet Union. Nilsen has been editor of the Barents Observer since 2009, including the period when its staff were employees of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat. In 2015, after the secretariat decided that the newspaper no longer should have the editorial freedom that its staff believed essential to the editor’s rights and duties, the staff reporters all resigned and then relaunched the newspaper as a journalist-owned, independent company. Nilsen worked for 12 years for the Bellona Foundation’s Russian study group, focusing on nuclear safety issues and general environmental challenges in northern areas and the Arctic. Having traveled extensively in the Barents Region and northern Russia since the 1980s, he is also a guide at sea and in remote locations in the Russian north and regularly lectures on security issues as well as environmental and socio-economic development in the region. Nilsen studied at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.
Professor Medvedev emphasized the importance of the Arctic to Russia’s self-image as a great power. In recent years, the Arctic has gained importance in public discussions. Three recent episodes illustrate this significance.

First was the 2007 act of planting a titanium Russian flag on the sea floor by an Arctic explorer and State Duma deputy. This action asserted a claim about the extent of the Lomonosov Ridge from the Russian continental shelf.

Second was the Olympic Torch relay in 2013. Russia demonstrated its interests in the Arctic region by including the North Pole on the torch’s route.

Third was the 2013 attack by Russian border forces on a Greenpeace ship in international waters as it was approaching a Russian drilling platform. The Russian forces seized the ship and arrested the crew. Eventually they were released.

Russia’s legacy in the Arctic includes colonization and centuries of portrayals of the Arctic as part of Russia’s territorial greatness. However, these assertions have been more about symbolism than actual realities, said Medvedev. Russia first claimed the Arctic region’s rich fur resources, and in recent times, its oil and gas resources. Even though Russia was “colonizing emptiness,” Russians could take pride in the vast territorial extent of the country.

The Soviet regime encouraged extravagant development plans for the Arctic, among them the idea of diverting the waters of the rivers feeding into the Far North into a system of canals and rivers flowing south. However, Medvedev said, for the most part, these plans came to nothing.

Under Stalin, the Arctic became a vast penitentiary. Forced Gulag labor built many projects, including canals and railroads. After the end of the Gulag system, many of these projects fell into disuse. Today they are economically nonviable.

Medvedev cited the book by Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, The Siberian Curse (2005), which showed that because the Soviet planners built industrial facilities and cities in extremely cold and remote locations, the average “temperature per capita” of Russia’s population fell over the 20th century and is the coldest in the world. The “cost of the cold” for Russia’s economy is still very high, and has left behind some “ghost cities,” such as Vorkuta, that are not viable in a market economy.

Today Russia makes claims to vast portions of the Arctic region, Medvedev pointed out, but there is an impasse over these claims because of competing claims on the part of Denmark and Canada to parts of these territories.

Russia sees the Arctic region as important for energy development. However, these plans are not sustainable, because Russia currently lacks the technology needed to realize them. After the Western sanctions following the annexation of Crimea and the drop in world oil prices, Western oil companies pulled out of the region. However, Russian companies, which receive subsidies from the state, continue extraction operations.

The Russian government considers the Northern Sea Route an important asset, said Medvedev. However, its waters remain uncharted, drift ice still floats in the channel, and there are almost no infra-
structure installations along the route.

In sum, Russia’s plans are hollow, as Medvedev sees it. Russia lacks the technology to realize them, and oil prices are too low to generate sustained profits. The Northern Sea Route is not viable commercially. The inherited infrastructure in the Arctic region is largely left over from the Soviet era and is outdated. Russia’s territorial claims produce jurisdictional disputes with Denmark and Canada. Therefore much of the Russian development is the equivalent of Potemkin villages.

During the discussion, Professor Medvedev was asked whether he feels free to speak publicly on these issues. He described an incident arising from the Greenpeace episode in 2013. Greenpeace had been advocating to “Save the Arctic,” by which it meant placing the Arctic on a similar footing as Antarctica. That would mean the region would not have a military presence or be exploited for mineral development. Medvedev commented favorably about Greenpeace’s position and immediately received a great deal of public criticism and continuing pressure. Among the critics was President Putin, who called him a “moron.” Medvedev believes that there is danger for anyone who speaks out and takes a position the authorities regard as hostile. Russia is different in 2021 even than it was in 2020 or in previous years, he said.

Discussing possible future development of LNG (liquefied natural gas) in Russia, Medvedev agreed that it probably has a brighter future than does oil, but that Russia lacks the technology to build an LNG facility. As more sanctions are imposed, it will become harder for Russia to acquire that technology.

He also stressed the symbolic importance of the Arctic for legitimating Putin’s regime. President Putin, he said, sees the Arctic as central to his own image as a great historic Russian leader who has “gathered Russian lands.” Therefore issues pertaining to the Arctic are highly sensitive politically. Like World War II, the Arctic has acquired a sacred status, and is treated as an imperative for state policy that overrides all other considerations.

Medvedev took issue with the view expressed by a number of speakers about the importance of multilateral agreements in governing the Arctic. He argued that the emphasis should now be on the initiatives taken by individual states toward environmental sustainability. Ideally, states would compete in an international market for public attention and reputation by taking actions that demonstrate their commitment to peaceful and environmentally sustainable development.

In Russia, there is some ambivalence about climate change. On the one hand, Russia has accepted the Paris Agreement and wants to benefit from a good public reputation as a leader in fighting climate change. On the other, Russian government and popular attitudes often still consider the natural environment an inexhaustible source of resources and a dump for waste products. So far, Russia has not undertaken any serious steps to change its energy-use habits.

Russia has a major stake in climate change, however. Medvedev pointed out that some two-thirds of Russian territory lies in the permafrost zone. If the permafrost thaws, huge amounts of Russian infrastructure will be compromised or lost. Russia has an enormous shoreline on the Arctic Ocean. Taking measures now to avert major disasters in the future would take long-term, strategic thinking. But, Medvedev said, Russia is very poor at this.

Medvedev disagreed with remarks by Olafur Grimsson, who argued that Western countries must stop behaving in such a way as to isolate Russia. According to Grimsson, we must weigh the relative priority of climate change and the Arctic against the events of the past, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We must engage Russia, which is the most important Arctic State, and stop driving Russia and China into a closer relationship. Currently those countries are forming a new axis aimed at increasing exploitation of the Arctic.

Medvedev responded that to act solely on the principles of realpolitik would betray our basic moral principles, as happened with appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s. Massive violations of human rights, whether in Russia or in China, must not be ignored for the sake of practical interests.

Reported by Thomas F. Remington

SERGEI MEDVEDEV is a journalist, television and radio host, and political scientist. Now a professor at Moscow Free University, Dr. Medvedev also taught for 16 years at the School of Economics in Moscow and earned multiple teaching awards. He has worked at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Germany, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (Ebenhausen), and the Istituto Affari Internazionali (Rome). Dr. Medvedev advocates international control over the Arctic, based on the Antarctic model. He believes Russia has a special responsibility to protect the Arctic and advocates a ban on oil drilling and economic activity and on military actions and movements. Dr. Medvedev's most recent book is The Return of the Russian Leviathan. He earned a B.A. in international journalism from Charles University in Prague, an M.A. in international affairs from Columbia University, and a Ph.D. in History of International Relations and Foreign Policy at the Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences. Dr. Medvedev has completed dozens of world marathons, several mountain marathons, and ultramarathons in the Alps, the TOUR Transalp cycle race (twice), and the Arctic Circle Race ski race in Greenland (twice).
Strengthening Governance of the Arctic Region

Roles for diplomacy and cooperation

David Balton

David Balton, former U.S. Ambassador for Oceans and Fisheries, concluded the Sunday morning session, “The Arctic’s Role in International Security and Stability,” on a hopeful note. “The Arctic has been a fairly peaceful place, and with some cool heads, I think we can keep it that way,” he said, “even as we deal with challenges we face.” The challenges he outlined in reaching that conclusion relate to climate change and climate problems, and to competition among great powers.

Balton began with a statement Mikhail Gorbachev made in 1987 in a speech in Murmansk, as the Cold War was winding down. Gorbachev said the Soviet Union wanted to lower the level of military confrontation in the Arctic, and he wanted the region to become a zone of peace.

Balton noted that for some years after the Cold War, the Arctic was largely a peaceful region, until U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo, in 2019, spoke of the area’s becoming an arena for power and competition and refused to accept language in an Arctic Council declaration relating to climate change. As a result of Pompeo’s refusal, for the first time since its founding in 1996 the council could not agree on a declaration to chart its course over the next two years, although it agreed to work together on science-based studies.

On a more positive note, Balton addressed the “amazing array of institutions and arrangements [that] have actually been put in place for the Arctic” over the last 25 years to confront the range of issues the region must address.

“Probably the most influential and consequential group in the Arctic is the Arctic Council. ... It has dealt with environmental protection. It has helped countries pursue sustainable development projects,” and, although peacekeeping is not formally part of its mandate, “the Arctic Council has helped to keep the peace in the Arctic.”

The council has spun off other institutions, such as the Arctic Coast Guard Forum and the Arctic Economic Council, which have been influential in helping the countries of the region resolve issues. In addition, The United Nations International Maritime Organization has focused on shipping in the Arctic, and the International Scientific Committee has “devoted a lot of attention to the Arctic.” All of this has been possible because the Arctic countries have been able to foster a cooperative environment.

Those who are critical of the Arctic Council contend that the council cannot adopt decisions that are binding on the eight Arctic States that are its members. But these states have created binding rules among themselves to deal with mutual problems, said Balton. And the Arctic Council has created task forces to negotiate new treaties among its member countries. These treaties deal with search and rescue missions, potential oil spills, and scientific cooperation. All three treaties are enforced, and all were co-led by the United States and Russia.

“Despite serious conflicts about other parts of the world, about other issues,” said Balton, “[the U.S. and Russia] chose to compartmentalize the Arctic ... and focus on what we have in common and work together in efforts to address serious problems.”

Other enforced agreements deal with safety of shipping and the potential for fishing in areas that were once solid ice but now are open water part of the year. An agreement signed in 2018 by ten Arctic and non-Arctic states forbids fishing in the area for at least 16 years, as a joint program in scientific research studies the sustainability of commercial fishing in the waters. Nine of the ten signatories have ratified the agreement, and China assures the others that there are no obstacles to its ratification.

There are territorial disputes in the area that do create potential problems. Balton began his discussion of these disputes with the comment, “I wish I had a dollar for every time [these disputes] are mischaracterized in the press or in events like this.”

The disputes are over ownership of sea floor under the ocean. “There is no land territory above water that is in dispute,” said Balton. The disputes relate to so-called continental shelves that extend beyond 200 miles from shore and may be considered the property of a country if the sea floor meets certain tests.

“What happens when there are overlapping claims to sea floor? Maritime boundary lines are
EDWARD R. NOTE: The final panel of the 2021 Camden Conference.

FRANCES ULMER: The Arctic Council, which has been in existence for 25 years, and it is the place where the Arctic nations can not only talk to each other, but listen to each other, find common ground together on things that are important, where there’s both a self-benefit and a mutual benefit. So the agreements that have already come forward—search and rescue, oil spill responsibility, international scientific cooperation, and most recently the central Arctic Ocean fisheries moratorium—illustrate the answer to your question. Now beyond that, where there are individual national prerogatives, responsibilities, legal frameworks, and priorities, it’s very difficult. And it becomes more likely that there are more multilateral or bilateral agreements where, in a region, it is clearer what the mutual benefit and the self-benefit is in a way that’s compatible.

SERGEI MEDVEDEV: I know this may sound controversial, and it will sound a bit heretic here, but at this point, in 2021, I do not believe in multilateralism. We are actually driving towards a world of national egoism and big crises of international institutions. I think at some point this phase in international relations will be overcome, but, at this point, I really believe in unilateral action by significant players. I think that individual nations should take proactive initiatives, unilateral initiatives in limiting their environmental impacts and limiting their engagements.

... Of course we have lots of common interests. But first of all, we’ll have lots of national egoism and ambition and egos, and the Arctic has been the site of international competition for decades. And it’s not like the remote Antarctica. It was very easy to agree on the Antarctic in 1958. But on the Arctic it’s a totally different thing. We can wait for decades for key players to agree on some key issues, especially as China comes to the table. I think that it depends on national governance, on the United States, on Canada, on Russia. ... And then, others will follow. So there will eventually be a market for [multilateral] initiatives.

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DAVID BALTON is a Senior Fellow at the Polar Institute in the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. Ambassador Balton previously served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries, attaining the rank of ambassador in 2006. He coordinated U.S. foreign policy concerning oceans and fisheries, as well as issues relating to the Arctic and Antarctica. Ambassador Balton has been the lead U.S. negotiator on a wide range of agreements. During the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2015–2017), he served as chair of the Senior Arctic Officials. He also co-chaired Arctic Council task forces that produced the 2011 Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement and the 2013 Agreement on Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic. He separately chaired negotiations to produce an Arctic fisheries agreement. Earlier, he had been director of the Office of Marine Conservation at the State Department and worked in the Office of Legal Advisor, where he dealt with issues related to the law of the sea, human rights, and international claims. Ambassador Balton received an A.B. from Harvard College and a J.D. from Georgetown University. He has appeared with the National Symphony Orchestra (juggling oranges).

Final Panel Highlights

EDITOR’S NOTE: This Q&A is excerpted from the final panel of the 2021 Camden Conference. Questions and responses have been edited for length and clarity.

DAVID BRANCACCIO, MODERATOR: How will diverse actors with an interest in the Arctic find a common approach on fossil fuel, climate change, self-governance for indigenous people, and so forth?

FRANCES ULMER: Well, as you know, we have a forum, the Arctic Council, which has been in existence for 25 years, and it is the place where the Arctic nations can not only talk to each other, but listen to each other, find common ground together on things that are important, where there’s both a self-benefit and a mutual benefit. So the agreements that have already come forward—search and rescue, oil spill responsibility, international scientific cooperation, and most recently the central Arctic Ocean fisheries moratorium—illustrate the answer to your question. Now beyond that, where there are individual national prerogatives, responsibilities, legal frameworks, and priorities, it’s very difficult. And it becomes more likely that there are more multilateral or bilateral agreements where, in a region, it is clearer what the mutual benefit and the self-benefit is in a way that’s compatible.

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MODERATOR: What’s Russia doing on climate change? How are they doing?

MEDVEDEV: That’s a hard question. To begin with, I think Russia is a thoroughly environmentally unfriendly nation. ... We’re not friendly to our own environment. The way we live, the way we litter, the way we use our resources, this country is premised on the idea of inexhaustible resources. ... Russia has, of course, been taking a certain stance on the Paris climate agreement, but I think it has to do not really with a sincere environmental concern [but] with sort of geopolitical stakes.

I have yet to see a significant national initiative or a significant breakthrough in Russia’s environmental inputs. So far as far as the Arctic is concerned, I think the headlines are the environmental catastrophes which have taken place. In 2020 was the oil spillage in Kamchatka, of which we cannot find the proper reasons. Eventually I think Russia has to be very sensitive about this; Russia has to be in the front line of suggesting an environmental regime for the Arctic, because we are the most affected country in this. Russia is just sitting on the permafrost. ... If the permafrost starts to melt, pipelines will crack, the cities will crack, and roads, bridges, or railroads, everything will just float there. Siberia will be the world capital for malaria. It will be just one big bog, one big marsh. ... So Russia should be really concerned. ... [But] this entails a very long-term strategic thinking, and this is really what my country is bad at, strategic thinking, long-term thinking.

So many things have to change in order for my country to realize its national security needs are not NATO policies or whatever ... but environmental catastrophe from the Arctic.

MICHAEL BRAVO: I would dare not dispute what you’ve just said, Sergei. But I think you’d be the first to admit Russia is also a very complex country, and I’m thinking of the work of people, like Elana Wilson Rowe, who’ve interviewed Russian scientists. So there is also a more varied story, even if it doesn’t change the current outcomes. It does seem that there are many Russian scientists who are very serious about climate change, that Russia at the time of Kyoto came on board perhaps before some other major countries represented here.

And lastly, I think in this conference, though they’re not present, it would be really good to acknowledge the presence of the indigenous people of Russia represented at the Arctic Council through RAIPON, though not necessarily the best place to vocalize their positions on climate change. But I think they belong at the table.

MEDVEDEV: Yes, I totally agree. ... We have really top-level scientists on climate change and so on. What we’re talking about is policy outputs with respect to climate change. What we’re talking about is national awareness of this issue. There was a recent poll, and climate change [ranks] ... between 40 and 50 in the list of national priorities as polled by several thousand Russians.

MODERATOR: I think one of the questioners reminds us from yesterday that the new chairmanship of the Arctic council is Russia?

DAVID BALTON: Yes, that’s correct. Iceland will wrap up its chairmanship in May, and Russia will take over for the next two years. Russia has announced their program of work for the Arctic Council during its leadership. It is heavy on economic development, not so heavy on environmental protection, though, as Sergei is saying, perhaps a more enlightened approach from Russia would be to realize that it does need help, including from the other Arctic countries in cleaning up parts of Russia. In fact, the Arctic council has quietly done a lot of that over the years. ... One of the things I’m hoping the Russians do in their leadership of the Arctic Council is to actually strengthen the council itself. There are any number of limitations, shortcomings the Arctic Council has, some of which can be strengthened.

OLAFUR RAGNAR GRÍMSSON: I might just enter this discussion because I think this directs us to the big elephant in the room, which we in Europe and in America have not really dared to discuss. And that is the following question. Isn’t it essential in order to have success in climate change, and to have a success in the future of the Arctic, to have a more positive and constructive approach towards Russia? If we continue the present tendency to always put Russia on the spot, blame Putin for all kinds of things, election interference, make Russia the kind of big enemy, impose more sanctions, one sanction after another, we are simply isolating the largest Arctic State. We need to say, in the Western Arctic discussion, Russia is the most important Arctic state. ... Is it more important to carry on following what happened in Ukraine about 10 years ago or in other areas of the world? Is that more important than trying to engage the largest Arctic State and a crucial climate player like Russia in our constructive policies toward the Arctic and the climate?

BALTON: I think President Grímsson is right in the sense that we do need more engagement and a different tone, but it is a matter of compartmentalization. It’s not so easy to sweep aside Russian election interference, Russian invasion of Crimea, more recently Russian hacking of U.S. computer systems at high levels. But still we have common interests. ... We need Russian cooperation much as we need Chinese cooperation on a number of things, including, say, dealing with North Korea. This is what diplomats have to do. We need to be able to compartmentalize.

GUNN-BRITT RETTER: First of all, we are talking about the Arctic Council, and I think we do engage with Russia, but when I stepped into the Arctic Council room 20 years ago, my sense is that the Russian language was more in use back in those days than it is today. So I think all the Arctic discussions had turned into very English-language-dominated discussions. ... I think we have to be better at translating reports into the Russian language to ensure that at least there’s a better opportunity or better access for the Russian public to get the knowledge that Arctic Council produces or get access to the reports and other studies it produces.

ULF SVERDRUP: I agree that with our Icelandic friend that you cannot ignore Russia, you cannot bypass Russia for establishing some kind of Arctic governance. So Russia is a really important country in the Arctic. But, at the same time, I think that we have to be a bit cautious. We have to balance a dialogue and exchange with Russia, but at the same time also have some clear red lines and the policy of deterrence, because we cannot basically assume that we in the West should just accept anything coming out of Russia.
GRÍMSSON: What you have just described is the official Western view. But while we maintain this view, Russia, China, Japan, Korea in the last five, ten years escalated their cooperation and dialogue about the Russian part of the Arctic, which is the biggest part of the Arctic. So setting all kinds of conditions before dialogue with Russia simply has opened up the scenario that the most active players now in the Arctic are based on this new axis between Asia and Russia in the Arctic. And that is a reality that the United States, Canada, and the European part of the Arctic has to face. And if we continue these conditions for engagement, this evolution of the Asian-Russian role in the Arctic will simply grow stronger and stronger. And that role is primarily directed to oil and gas, mining, shipping, not climate, not indigenous rights and the other issues that we are talking about.

MEDVEDEV: I would beg to differ with President Grímssson and actually not in the sense that I would suggest isolating Russia or imposing sanctions on Russia on the part of the Arctic Council, especially since this is now criminally punishable in Russia. If I suggest some kind of sanctions against pressure, you know, I will go to the prison in the next couple of months. There is an important thing which he mentioned, that we should be driven by the principles of realpolitik. And this has really surprised me, because I think that since 1945, the world has been driving towards more international liberal and institutionalism rather than principles of realpolitik. And I really do believe that morality and ethical values do have a role to play also in such areas as Arctic governance.

I understand all the difference between a European council like the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Arctic Council. [The Council of Europe] can, of course, impose sanctions. ... But, you know, Europe has learned these lessons. We have played utilitarian values versus deontological values, right? The logic of utilitarianism versus the deontology, the Kantian idealism, the moral values. So in the 1930s, in the policy of appeasement of Germany. And I think that much of the Putinversteher discourse, the “Putin understander” discourse, the “Russia understander” discourse, goes along the same lines these days, because this is all too comfortable, and actually this plays precisely [into] the expectation of the Russian government, that despite everything that’s happening in the country, we are a recognized international player and there is international tolerance for it because we’re so big, because we’re so important, because there’s a whole big legacy of Russian engagement in the area.

Of course, for practical reasons, Russia has to be accepted, and it has to be given a voice. I’m not calling for anything, but I think we have really to weigh the practicality of certain policies versus the morality of certain policies. And for me being inside Moscow, it’s very hard to imagine there’s one story going on here with thousands of people, tens of thousands being imprisoned ... or, let’s not talk about Russia, let’s talk about China. Can Arctic nations deal with China as if nothing is happening, forgetting the concentration camps for the Uighurs, because the Uighur issue is just one thing, and we’re playing on a different sheet of music, right? We’re playing the Arctic music. So let’s forget the Uighurs, let’s forget Chinese human rights policy. So should we forget Russian human rights policy? ... Once again, I think really it’s about weighing the utilitarian versus the idealist. I really sound a bit funny, defending Kantian idealism in 2021. But I think it has a place in politics.

MODERATOR: I think another thread in our discussions has been this idea of an impulse to make other people solve the problem and not shoulder the burden ourselves. Some of the questioners were interested in this, about making sure that we address the tendency to fix the problem by asking someone else to make a compromise, a sacrifice, or a concession.

ULMER: This is another way of framing the tragedy of the commons problem, really. How much tension is there between self-interest and common good, right? And we see this play out in so many different ways. And I would say in the space of whether it’s the Arctic or any other geography, you have to understand something before you can care about it. And until you care about it, you’re not willing to do something about it. So the question is, how do you get people to realize that only if they really care about something and can do something about it will they go beyond their self-interest. And I would say in the Arctic space, that’s exactly what President Obama was trying to do when he held the huge glacier conference in Anchorage and then went above the Arctic Circle, the very first U.S. president to ever do that, over six years ago.

I think all of us can play a role in not only doing what we first started talking about, which is explaining why the Arctic matters, why Arctic change, its dramatic pace, really impacts people regardless of where they live. It is through that understanding that people can care, and after caring, they can act. They also need to see how they individually can act, not just through policy pronouncements. So I think the kind of thing that Camden is doing is fabulous. And I want to congratulate the people who have participated, helped many people understand this region so that they can care about it and want to take action. ■
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